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Transcript

Hello. Hello, hello.

Welcome to the Oxford and the Property podcast.

You're listening, you're listening. Altered anthropology monitors anthropology podcast.

Welcome to the podcast channel of the School of Anthropology and Museum at Monography at the University of Oxford. My name is Louisa Aida and I'm an MSC student and social anthropology focusing on the anthropology of law. In this episode, we will be listening to Tim Ingold's very first presentation of his new book, The Rise and Fall of Generation. Tim Ingot began his career researching the ecological and social relations of humans, most prominently through his field work among the nomadic scold Sami people in northeast Finland. His work has been distinct in its interdisciplinary approach, engaging with biology, philosophy and ecological psychology. Tim England has researched the world. And relations and processes that are forever unfolding. He has described his approach to anthropology as philosophy with the people. In in his new book, he reverses the perspective and generations of. Life by considering them not as linear, but as a process. Asking what in the passage of generation comes before and what comes after. Does life take you any nearer to your ancestors, or does it draw you ever further away from them? I hope you enjoy the episode.

At the end of January, I just finished writing a little book. It's called the rise and fall of generation now, and this is its kind of first outing. I can't obviously read you the whole book, which I would like to read, although it's a short book, it would be too long to read. So I'm going to try a bit of the first chapter and the second chapter, so in that sense I'm going to read it, see how it goes. So imagine you are making rope. For your raw material, you've harvested A quantity of long Meadow grass, and the rope is formed through a double movement, first by twisting stems of grass aligned along their length into strands, and then by twisting the strands around one another. And the key thing is that the 2nd. Twist should be contrary to the first, because that ensures that the torque of the individual strands, which would otherwise cause them individually to unwind. Only tightens the twist as they're winding together while the talk of the other tightens. The 1st and these countervailing forces, along with the friction of longitudinal alignment of the stems themselves, both prevent the rope from unravelling and give it its tensile strength. But of course no. Grass stem is more than so long, but by paying new stems into the twist as old ones begin to give out. The rope itself can wind on indefinitely, or at least for as long as your supply of material thrusts, and if it runs out, you might have to wait another season for more to grow, and then with a new harvest you can pick up again from where you left off. Now imagine that each stem of grass is a life. It needn't be a human life, but let's suppose for the moment that it is. And as we know from experience, human lives are generally lived not in isolation but in the company of others. They go along together, and especially in more intimate settings such as of home and family, they twist around one another and these intimate gatherings in turn revolve around one another in the wider circulations of social life. Each winds the other up, lending social life a certain cohesion. And preventing it from fraying. The inclination of particular lives to go their own separate ways exerts a kind of friction that tightens the bonds of community, while conversely, any loosening of communal bonds tightens the intimacy with which these lives rub along and the counterpoint of tension and friction, which the ancient Greeks. Thought harmony. Harmonia holds it all. Of course, no one lives forever, but as fast as some age and eventually give out, others are born and entered into the twist. So despite the turnover of individual participants, social life can carry on indefinitely, with a rhythm born of the cycle of human generations. Now, to be sure, the analogy is not perfect, and perhaps the most critical difference between the rope and social life is that the 1st is made from materials already gathered, whereas the second makes itself as it goes along from lives ever growing from the tip. So they might perhaps be better likened to vines or creepers each winding around the others as it makes its way through a dense tangle of. And as with the tangle, new lives are not introduced from without, as our stems in making rope, but are born from within in much the same way as prior to harvesting. New shoots are born from old stems. Still I find the image of the rope a helpful place to start in thinking about the generation of social life, and that's my subject today and the questions are simple. What in the passage of generations comes before and what after? Our ancestors in front or behind. Or are descendants behind or in front? How does social life secure its own continuity or perjure? But the answers are of the utmost consequence, not least at a time when this continuity or perdurance seems under threat as never before. And I think this threat, or at least our perception of it, has much to do with a pronounced tendency in modern times to switch focus from the generation of social life to generations. What a difference the plural makes generation is a process of bringing forth of life. Not just at conception or birth, but in every moment of existence. Living, as we'll see, is what we do, but it's also what we undergo. Us winding along together, we actively generate ourselves and one another. But generations in the plural are like slices that cut across the life process. Every generation is a cohort of humanity that has fallen into rank at a particular time or over a particular interval, whose members judge themselves or are judged in some sense to be Co evil. And whose formation is complete at the outset? And in the March of Cohorts, we witnessed not continuity, but serial replacement as each in turn takes the stage and having enjoyed its share of the limelight is overlaid by its successor and sinks into the past. So generation carries on. But generations pile up stage by stage, layer upon layer into a. Now, this kind of stratigraphic thinking is deeply seared into modern sensibility into modern sensibilities, and leads to an easy equation of generational layers with layers of sedimentation and the history of the earth of deposits in the occupation of an archaeological site. Of documents in an archive, even of consciousness in the human. Mind, it's a way of thinking that has worked itself often without our noticing into every sphere in which human pasts and futures are at stake, weathering concerns about tradition and heritage, or conservation and extinction, sustainability and progress, or art and science. In every case, substituting the metaphor of the rope for that of the stack casts these concerns in an entirely different light. For whereas with the stack, every generation is set to replace its predecessor with the. Young lives overlap, older ones, and life itself is regenerated in their collaboration. And nor is this collaboration confined to human lives, since it extends to relations among living beings of every complexion. Only by rethinking generation along these lines, I contend, can we fashion a lasting foundation for coexistence. Now, according to the Book of Genesis, it all began with Adam. This is the book of the Generations of Adam proclaims the opening line of the books, 5th chapter at the Great Age of 130. Adam begat his son Seth, though he still lived for another 8 centuries. And went on to forget many more sons and daughters. And during all this time, Adam and Seth carried on their lives to. At the age of 105, Seth begat his son Enos, but he, too, lived for another 807 years before he died. And so it went on in. OSP begat Cainan, who begat Mahalalel, who begat Javid, who begat Enoch, who begat Methuselah, who begat Lamech who begat Noah. And each of these named characters. Except Seth was the first born and went on to enjoy, to enjoy an extraordinarily long life, begetting abundant sons and daughters. These were men of might and renown and their numerous descendants multiplied on the face of the Earth. And yet it was filled with violence and corruption. Well, what happened next isn't my concern here. My attention is rather drawn to the slightly archaic verb to be get. What does it actually mean for one human being to begets another? Now literally it's to set a new life in train. It's for one to bring the other into existence with the promise that the latter, when the time comes, we'll do the same again. There's a sense here of life being handed on in the manner of a relay kept going by the fresh momentum. And newcomers can impart even as the energies of forerunners begin to fade. In a in a relay, the baton passes from hand to hand with no change of direction. Quite unlike the kind of changing hands that happen, for example, when goods are bought or sold or, as we'll see when they're inherited. So crucial to be getting, in other words, is that it belongs to the same movement of life as the life it begets. It's a carry on, not a crossover, and as such it is not instant but temporal. The getting may begin in sexual Congress, but this is only the commencement of a process that endures above all in the everyday work of nurturance and care, through which parents bear and raise their offspring and the latter theirs. It is a labour of carrying and lifting. Now, of course, the story of Adam and his descendants is far from unique. Many peoples around the world take pride in being able to recite lengthy genealogies extending from founding ancestors to generations of life today. Often thus, in the biblical case, the list follows the male line, but some societies trace it through women, while others keep parallel lists of male and female lines. But common to every such list is that it is compounded of tales of begetting and being begotten. Now anthropologists, you know this for two will call this affiliation. The fundamental relation of parents and child, the word affiliation comes from the Latin filios and Philia, respectively. Son and daughter both, however, are personalised derivatives of phylum, meaning, thread. Every begetting thus introduces a new. Brought forth in the labour of parturition, it proceeds to wind around the parental threads as they carry on together, only to spin new threads as old ones give way. Affiliation, then, is an entwining of threads and to recite a genealogy by listing its names is to follow the twine. Indeed, naming itself the performance of naming is part of the process of begetting, of introducing the person and indexing their affiliations. So every name in its enunciation becomes part of the story. Consult any classic anthropological texts on the subject of kinship and dissent, however, and this is not how affiliation is depicted. Such texts are full of genealogical charts in which persons are conventionally represented by means of miniature icons, triangles for men and circles. To whom? If the chart is intended to depict a relation that is indifferent to the gender of those, its links, convention dictates a little diamond, a straight line connecting any 2 icons then depicts the relation horizontal. If it's of the same generation, such as siblings from the same union vertical, it is of successive. Generations affiliation then appears as a straight vertical line connecting parent, mother or father and child boy or girl, and you can see this on the left hand side of this diagram. But the line drawn here is not a line of life. On the contrary, the life of every person is condensed. In the diagram that's on a typical kinship chart chart. Into its condensed into a point, be it shaped as a circle, triangle or diamond. And the point is immobile fixed into place by its position in the genealogical frame, and the line even as it connects points, marks their irrevocable separation. So there's no begetting here, no relay like carry on from one life to the next for as long as they live. The distance between parent and child remains constant. So whatever practical or effective contact they might have during their lives will neither bring them closer together nor drive them further apart. They are where they are located by a calculus that determines their position independently of their lifetime, comings and goings, and this is the calculus. Of related to. When we say that parent and child are related in this sense, it tells us nothing about the quality of their relationship or about how they carry on their lives together. It tells us only that certain attributes or properties of the parent are replicated in those of the child, and to bring about such replication, one or several mechanisms are required that can carry these attributes and properties, not along but across from one life cycle. To the site of inauguration of another. So instead of begetting, there is an inheritance. Now I'm going. To leave that for a moment and. And jump on. To the next bit, so does life. Take you any nearer to your ancestors or does it draw you ever further away from them? Do you follow in their footsteps or face determinedly in the other direction? Are your ancestors ahead of you, beckoning you on towards the future, or are they left behind receding ever further into the past? And your descendants are they at your heels, or have they already overtaken, leaving you trailing in their wake? Which way is younger and which way is older? And these are perplexing questions. I've already compared the passage of generations to the winding rope of which every life is a strand. So let's start again from this analogy. We might allow the rope to run through our fingers, at least as far as it has been wound until now, reciting the names of ancestors in succession as we tell the story of who begat whom. Many people actually do do this. The names are strung along with earliest ancestors in the lead, followed by later ones. And the rope is quite literally, a record memory rewound, and surely you'll observe the narrative runs as life does from past to present and will continue into the future as the rope winds on. Well, that might be how it looks from the outside, but what would happen if you took up a perspective from within? Imagine yourself as one of the strands as you proceed through life ageing as you go. You leave a trail behind you, a trail of footsteps and picture the trail then. As a string of footsteps spalling out from beneath your feet with your earliest steps furthest in the rear, followed by later ones. Always ahead of you are your forebears who have handed the baton to you to carry on in the same direction. They are already now where you will be standing for the future towards which you are heading and behind you come your offspring now stepping where you once were so long ago they stand for the past and in the interval between them lies the ageing process. But this process is proceeding in a direction contrary to that of the genealogical narrative, because now your ancestors are before you and your descendants are at your back. It's as though you are standing in a queue which is ever shuffling forward as the rope continues to wind. And they're they're all the whole thing is moving along this way as you're ageing. But as it's moving along. New generations are spooling off, so ageing is going in One Direction, begetting is going in the other. Ageing is the inverse of begetting. And actually the etymology of the word queue offers a clue to this. Reversal of perspective is derived from the Latin cowder, meaning tail and was initially extended from tail to refer to the storks of plants and to plants of twisted hair, and thence to people standing in a line. To take their turn so just as ageing inverts, begetting the Q inverts the tail. So pace yourself. Imagine yourself in the queue with your predecessors ahead and your successors. No, not all these people, of course, may still or yet be alive and present in the immediately sensible world, but even those who have passed, as we might say, if only from the perspective of of an onlooker, even those who have passed continue to exert a hold over their followers, even as those. Who have yet to be born will emerge in the hold of yourself and your contemporaries. So the ancestors still beckon even as you await the coming of descendants. And in the mean time, and like everyone else, you process through life, measuring out your days in steps towards the future, which like a spatial horizon, nevertheless recedes as fast as you approach it. Now suppose you imagine all these people walking along in a queue, and now suppose that you have commanded to turn around through 180 degrees. What happens then? So you imagine the queue, it is all the queue you're waiting for the ice cream van over there and everybody is standing in the queue. You're walking along with the people behind you and people. So it's a right turn around. And everybody's coming straight at you and the people in the front are receding off in the distance, so everything now changes. For the people who once went before. The people who once went before you and now at your back while you now find yourself face to face with those who are once coming after. So the the the future which had formerly stretched away into the distance along ancestral paths as we see in the top row, now appears to be heading on a collision course straight towards you. Meanwhile, the ancestors upon whom you've now turned your back recede ever further into the past. Their time is over. So the very act of turning, as I've shown in the bottom row there, the very act of turning stakes, a claim for the present. The present is a hold up. And attempt to arrest the passage of time to bring it to a standstill. But no generation can hold its ground indefinitely, so eventually the press becomes too great, and it's either pushed aside or forced to move on to make way for the next generation. That promptly does the same, turning its back on the one preceding only to face its own successor. And a moment it turns, it takes the stand of a new present. So history reappears as a punctuated series of generational turning points, each claiming the present for itself. Now to join the queue as in the top row there to join the queue is to observe what we rightly call a tradition. Because the proper meaning of tradition, again from the Latin tradere meaning to hand over as in a relay, the proper meaning of tradition is not to live in the past, but to follow your predecessors into the future. You may retrace old ways, but every trace is an original movement to be followed in its term. It's the same with storytelling, in which the direction of live performance is inverted in the temporal flow of the narrative, even as the words fall from your lips, they recede into the slipstream of your onward movement. So strictly speaking, to turn your back on tradition is not to relinquish what is already passed. It is rather to deny the promise that tradition offers for the future, in other words, the pastness of tradition is not given our priori, but is produced in the very act of turning that stakes. The claim to the press. And this same turn around creates a future which, from the perspective of those still following traditional ways, is nothing if not backward looking, sacrificing the possibility of ceaseless beginning for the finality of predetermined ends and such. We may think, is the way. Of modernity. It's a way that measures time by the clock. Why, after all, does the clock tick? Its revolving movement, driven by the vital force of the spring which once always to unwind, or the weight of the pendulum as it gravitates to earth, is periodically stopped on the cog of an escapement wheel, or by a ratchet. Sorry, but on the cog of an escapement wheel by a ratchet, only to be released again, so the tick we hear is the sound of the ratchets engagement with the COG and the measured time of the clock lies not in the unwinding of the spring but in the series of stoppages each marked. By a tick. So likewise, do generations mark time by converting its onward movement into a punctuated series of escapements with life. As with time, the flow becomes a stutter. When life escapes, the entire series shifts by 1 notch. The foregoing generation, far from moving into the future, vanishes into the oblivion of the past, while the generation to come pivots to take its place in the present. So does every present generation, having turned its back on the past. Take its place as a gatekeeper to the future. That's why I think that's why there is such a compulsion to replace the old with the new. It proves that time is passing and history is being made. Nothing indeed catches the modern imagination more than the idea of a step change, because in the eyes of the present. The future figures less as a path to be followed than as a problem to be solved. Had it been solved by preceding generations now already past, there would be nothing for the present to do. They would only have to fall into line with the project mapped out for them in advance, and such compliance would amount to the renunciation of any future they could call their own. So the presence, ownership. Of the future depends on the assumption that the past got it wrong. This is the default assumption of the modern age that the road from the past is paved with errors. We always know better than they did. In science and technology, we will refute their conjectures to replace them with inventions of our own. In architecture, we will abandon their designs in favour of the latest innovations in education. We will cast aside the old order and induct students into the new. And yet the inevitable implication is that the solutions of the present will turn out in due course to have been equally mistaken. And while the generation that proposes these solutions, that is, say our generation will pass the impacts of applying them can linger. Just have the applications of generations preceding leading long lasting scars, not just in hearts and minds, but on the world around us. So every generation is fated to live among the ruins of the now obsolete futures proposed by generations past. Perhaps only half constructed before being demolished to make way for. The next. Now, if you were a celestial being, eternally standing guard at the gate at which these erstwhile Futures pass one by one into history, you would witness an immense pile up as future after future crashing into the present is reduced to rubble. You would be the personification of Angelus Novus, the Angel of history, as famously depicted in his monoprint by the artist Paul Clay, dating from 1920. A year later, the print was purchased by the philosopher critic Walter Benjamin and in a fragment penned in 1940, shortly before his own suicide as a fugitive from Nazism, Benjamin described the Angel. Thus, the very famous passage I shall just read. His face is turned towards the past where we perceive a chain of events. He sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The Angel would like to stay, awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise. It has got caught in his wings with such violence that the Angel can no longer close. Them the storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skywood, the storm is what we call progress. Well, the sense of despair is palpable. Mean can there be any respite from the cataclysmic chain of ultimate solutions that generation after generation has inflicted all in the name of progress? And so long as we seek to shape a future perceived as coming towards us by projecting our designs onto a world, our successes are about to enter, or the answer can only be no, we would be fated to the endless stuttering of the escapement mechanism, the stuttering after all. It's not a sign that progress is faltering. It's rather the way progress works by the serial accumulation of backwards moves. Why else along with the clock, are its iconic instruments, the excavator and the crane. The excavator empties the ground of the residues of past interventions, leaving none to pick up and follow. The crane lifts new ones into place from above. And yet the Angel gazes towards ancestral ways. He longs to regain the path of tradition with its promise of renewal for a future everlasting. To awaken the dead for Benjamin is precisely that. To undo the catastrophic turn of modernity and be guided once more by the light and lives of those who have gone before. So what if we were to follow the angel's gaze? He may seem to face the past with his back to the future, but that's only from the point of view of we who, having pivoted on the present, cast the future as a. The Angel himself stakes no claim for the present, but yearns for a time wherein every moment would be the future's past. Dismayed by the turn of events, his staring eyes admonish us to face in the same direction as our ancestors. Rather than back-to-back in, overlapping our lives with theirs, we could work together with them, not against them, to find a path forward. And critically, this is not a recipe for regression or inertia. People who continue to follow their ancestors are not backward. All too often, the belief that they're stuck in the past or left behind by history has been induced to justify their oppression or or worse, their annihilation. And it's a belief that comes as I've shown from putting tradition behind us, but to join with tradition facing frontward. Promises otherwise to open a future that far from converging on any projected end contains within itself the promise of eternity. So any generation that seizes the present for itself obstructs the steady progression in ageing from past to future. It throws an impenetrable barrier by order across the queue. Bisecting it at right angles, young and old, now find themselves irrevocably divided on either side. For the young, the present holds up their coming for the old. It recasts their passing as a retreat, and this separation of young and old, I believe, is one of the great tragedies of the modern age. Perhaps it's taken the pandemic of the last two years to bring the scale of the tragedy home to us. Because severe restrictions imposed during periods of lockdown often left the very young and very old in isolation, unable to meet in person, births remained uncelebrated and deaths unwarned. But the emergency only highlighted divisions already there for more often than not, grandparents and grandchildren will be living far apart in separate households. Even institutions visiting only intermittently to renew their contact. It is as though a wedge had been driven between them. And that wedge is the generation of the present. Thrust between youth and old age is what I'm going to call generation now. Now the people of generation now are in charge, having taken possession of their own slice of time and history. They're so busy with their world, making so preoccupied with the affairs of the day that they pay scant regard to their elders or to their juniors. Their elders, they think having already enjoyed their place in the sun, should fade away gracefully into years of decline. Their juniors, to the contrary, need to be brought up to speed to face a future already prepared for them. And the result is to give a peculiar Inflexion to the life course. It appears to be shaped rather like in this diagram here, like a bell curve roughly divisible into 3 phases. In the first phase. The capacities of young minds are both formed and filled with what they need to know in order to function in the new world. They are about to encounter in the second intermediate phase. World forming powers are at their peak. Everyone is hard at work fulfilling their potential as they like to say. But once this potential is exhausted, having nothing further to deliver, they enter the final phase of deterioration and decline as their capacities fade and their knowledge becomes increasingly obsolete. Now what is measured then by the height of the curve from the base intellectual prowess, the conversion of potential into effective power? Knowledge. It could be all these things, but one thing the curve does not measure is wisdom. There is, of course wisdom in not knowing the wives may not know, but they can tell in both its senses. Their attention is finely tuned to variations in the environment that can matter to their ways of living, and they are well versed in the stories of the world, including above all those. Of ancestral beings whose activities gave the world its present form. Among people we would nowadays call indigenous, but who long ago would have included almost everyone whose living was drawn from the Earth and its waters. Youngsters would grow up hearing the stories and observing the practises of their elders. Discovering the meanings of the stories and developing skills of attention in the passage of their own experience and becoming storytellers and practitioners in their turn. This is not inheritance, but perdurance as stories are carried on and skills regenerated in the collaboration of generations. Now, throughout most of human history, this is precisely how lives have been lived. Old and young would work and age together. Yet by and large, this is no longer the case today. So what happened? What led powerful agents of the intermediate generation forcibly and in some cases by? Italy to Cut the Rope of begetting to tear children away from the company of their elders, all in the name of progress. We know this from indigenous people, First Nations people in Canada whose parents whose children were were were torn away from in Australia. It's happened over and over again, all in the name of progress. What has fired? The generation now with such world making zeal as to consign the wisdom of its seniors to a bygone past while treating its own juniors as empty vessels bereft of knowledge in need of induction into a future they can have no hand in shaping. Now answers are not easy to come by and they probably have much to do with capitalism. Erosion of domestic modes of production. With the redeployment of educational functions from the family to the state. And in the case of indigenous peoples, of course, with colonial oppression. But what's certain is that generation now has little time for stories or for skills. These, it says, other stuff of tradition preserves only to entertain the young in enactments of heritage, or indulge the old in flights of nostalgia. Because generation now is target driven, it has its ends and its means yet as its ends expand, fuelled by ambitions of progressive development, so its means contract its short term objectives hold no promise that life can endure. Beyond the future already in its sights. Faced with looming environmental catastrophe, it has no answer save to dream of a permanent geotechnology call fix or a finding new reservoirs on other planets, leaving the bulk of humanity to eke out a living on an irreparable, irreparably damaged Earth. Every competition has far more losers than winners, and for every individual smart enough to succeed, another thousand will fail. A world that carries on, however, and offers hope for generations to come, cannot be for some but not others, let alone reserved for a select few. It must have room for everyone and everything for all time, and I'm arguing that there is only one way to bring in such a world and that. Is by loosening the grip of generation now. That is, can we imagine a society in which the young and the elderly currently excluded from the tasks of wealth making, are once again enabled to collaborate in forging the conditions of collective life? Now I'm going to talk of the real people, the the Chukchi. Are people indigenous to the far North East of Siberia? Have two words for what we might call life or existence, namely Virgin and unat girgin. And yet their meanings are subtly different. Or not. Gergen pertains to the beings and things we encounter around us. Each lives each exists along its own particular path, carrying on through time like everything else. Yet it exists only as a kind of twist, a coiling over itself as the everlasting creative movement that is life or existence itself, and this latter is either given. Without voyagin, as the anthropologist Jeanette Luchadore puts in her sensitive study of life and death amongst the Chukchi villages of Achayan in northern Kamchatka. Without fairgreen, there would be no humans, no trees, no rivers, no animals, no sun, and so on. So amidst the force of life that divided in things and beings come into presence or not kirigin for what they are, each with its own form and character. But no mortal, being no mortal creature lasts forever, and when its time comes, as eventually it must. And so long as customary rights are observed, it will melt back into the very flux of creation whence it came, and from which everything originates. In short, death for the Chukchi. Is not an end point. It is actually a passage into life or better from the realm of the actual into that of the possible. Actual life, like the strand of the rope to which we've already drawn comparison, is full of twists and turns. It coils on itself and around other lives in a spiralling movement that swerves without interruption. With swerves without interruption from the overall direction of flow forming itself as it goes. And reading Luca, God's account of the Chukchi life world, put me in mind once again of the philosophy of antley Bankston, for which from which I have derived much inspiration. It's in the nature of the living, Bergson argued to turn upon themselves. Life in general moves on, but particular. Lives always lagged behind. They are reluctant tensing against the flow and winding this tension into their bodily pop. So long as they have the stamina to do so until eventually their strength wanes and in death they unwind back into the mainstream and echoing beckson the philosopher Gilbert Simondon would later remark on this capacity of falling out of step with themselves by which living? Feelings resolve themselves into actuality. And this image of falling, falling in and out of step brings back to mind my earlier metaphor of the queue. For Simon DOT, As for Benson, the Cube moves on despite all the twists, turns, and missteps of the living. And it's from its very momentum that creatures draw the energy to generate and sustain their being. Or in a word, for their ontogenesis their their development. Likewise for the Chukchi Ornat, Gergen is drawn from Virgin, the actual from the possible. And conversely, actual life harbours an intrinsic Dr towards the possibility of death, a progression we experience as ageing. But generation now, as it pivots to stake its claim to the present, brings this entire movement to a juddering halt. Its life now confined within its own generational layer, is compressed into the equivalent of running on one spot. Faced with the otherwise inevitable prospect of obsolescence and eventual replacement, it does all it can to prolong its hold over the present, seeing ageing as an affront to be resisted. That's why, as Benjamin observes, generation now has no envy for the future. Its happiness, Benjamin wrote, is steeped in the time assigned to it by the span of its own existence. Nor does generation now have anytime for death. It views death not as a movement intrinsic to life, but as an external adversary, attributable to agents of morbidity which have to be staved off by all available means. In the transhumanist dream of immortality, this view is taken to its logical extreme. For transhumanists, death is just another problem to be solved. And the fact that every human being alive today is bound to die is merely an index of our technical failure up to now to come up with a viable solution. The machinery of the body is still liable to malfunction and its mental operator inclined to go missing. But if these issues can be fixed, nothing in principle would prevent humans from living forever. They could say goodbye once and for all to the travails of ageing and begetting. Now this dream is not new. On the contrary, it's inherent in the very idea of progress. In his history of 19th century evolutionary thought, John Burrough has observed how believers in progress would always wish theirs to be the final, or at least the penultimate generation. As he says on the point of opening the last envelope. But it's quite otherwise for the Chukchi ageing and begetting in their world are the twin conditions of continuing life. The worst that can put before a person is to die in hospital, not just far from home, but in the clutches of a biomedical regime that, in treating death as terminal, irrefutable, irrevocably blocks re-entry into possible life into Biogen. And yet, perhaps even in a society such as ours, with generation now firmly in charge, vestiges of possibility remain among both young and elderly at opposite tales of the Bell curve. Alternatively, not yet and already over, they merge in a penumbra surrounding the bright light of the present. And together, grandparents and grandchildren are in touch in ways that target driven intermediates of the parental generation and not with more enduring rhythms of time. This is a time not of diachronic replacement and succession, but of continuous renewal of weather and the seasons of breaking waves and running rivers of the growth and decay of vegetation and the coming and going of animals, of breaths and heartbeats. That's the time for which Angelus Novus, the Angel of history yearns were young and old to put their heads together and wonder, could they bring it back?

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